

2 March 1954

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THE SYRIAN SITUATION

BACKGROUND

I. Syrian Political Parties

- A. The National Bloc - prominent in independence movement against French; in power when first army coup occurred March 1949. Leaders are Shukri Quwatli, Jamil Mardam, Hashem al Atassi. Current Nationalists in cabinet are: Sabri Asali, Prime minister, Muhammad Sulayman al-Ahmad, Fakhir Kayyali, Afif Sulh.
- B. The Populist Party - formed in 1948 in opposition to Quwatli group of Nationalists. Largest and most important party, closest to Western type of party. Promoted secular, representative democracy, moderate socio-economic reforms and Arab nationalism. Prominent members are Ma'ruf Dawalibi, minister of defense in new cabinet, Faydi al Attassi, pro-Western minister of foreign affairs.
- C. The Arab Socialist Party - extreme leftist and anti-Western group led by Akram Hawrani. Merged in December

1952 with pan-Arabist Arab Resurrectionist Party, also
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extremists.

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D. The Syrian Social National Party - a small group which

aims at the re-establishment of geographical Syria -- Syria,

Lebanon, former Palestine, Jordan and Iraq. Shishakli

once a member.

E. The Arab Liberation Movement - Shishakli's party which he

organized in 1952. Can now be assumed to be inoperative.

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THE SYRIAN SITUATION

I. A Confused Situation

- A. Shishakli out after four-year military dictatorship, but civil government set up with military support as his successor shaky and obviously temporary.
- B. Octogenarian President Hashem al Atassi symbol of national unity, civilian coalition cabinet and army in background.
 - 1. Cabinet led by Prime Minister Asali, one of three Independents, five Nationalists and four Populists.
 - a. Nationalists part of old independence movement against French.
 - b. Some Populists favor union with Iraq.
 - 2. Minister of Defense Dawalibi, opportunistic, anti-Western, Pan-Islamist supporter of Mufti and Moslem Brotherhood; also widely considered pro-Communistic.
 - 3. Minister of Foreign Affairs Faydi Atassi experienced able pro-Western nephew of president.

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4. Army leadership apparently not unified; no dominant personality yet.

II. Anticipated Developments

- A. Efforts restore 1951 constitutional situation will meet great difficulties.
 1. Politicians deeply divided and disorganized. None too popular and no party organization. Exiled leaders--ex-president, Quwatli and ex-premier Mardam likely to return. Both have Saudi support.
 2. Bitter quarrels over union with Iraq. Asali reportedly received money from Iraq to overthrow Shishakli. Some Syrians also support union; others with Saudi subsidy oppose union. Egypt also works against it.
- B. New opportunities for radical socialists, Communists and Moslem Brotherhood.
 1. Weakness of parties may give significant role to leftist Akram Hawrani. Alleged Hawrani partisan is one of revolt leaders, Captain Hamdun.

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2. Brotherhood and Communists inspired some disturbances. Communists tried seize radio Damascus. Leader, Moscow-trained Khalid Bakhdash. Party illegal since 1947.

- C. Army will be tempted re-enter scene as did in three 1949 coups, ending in Shishakli's open dictatorship in 1951. Struggle for power now going on in army.

III. Implications for US

Coalition government unable move forward on any issue significant to US.

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MIDDLE EAST REACTIONS TO TURKISH-PAKISTANI
DEFENSE PLANS

I. Summary Statement

- A. Middle East press reactions to announcements of defense talks between Turkey and Pakistan and grant of US military aid to Pakistan generally unfavorable.
- B. Official reactions, however, varied from highly favorable in Iraq to strongly hostile in India.
- C. Recent Arab states' comment sparse due to preoccupation with internal crisis in Egypt and Syria.
- D. Israel remains suspicious of development it fears might eventually strengthen Arabs, while Iran interested but noncommittal.
- E. Reactions in Turkey and Pakistan naturally enthusiastic.

II. South Asia

A. India

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1. Nehru's private reaction, given Ambassador Allen on 24 February, surprisingly mild.

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2. His speech of 1 March, however, typical

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against American policy in Asia, rejecting President
Eisenhower's offer of military aid to India as 25X6
"unworthy" of US and announcing India no longer
recognizes neutrality of American members UN observers
team in Kashmir.

3. Indian press generally held fire pending Nehru's
speech, but will take cue from his statements.

B. Pakistan

1. Enthusiasm nearly unanimous, emphasizing receipt of
American military aid rather than talks with Turkey.
2. Indications that Pakistan taking more careful look
at Turkish agreement since US aid announced, but
agreement not in jeopardy.

C. Afghanistan

1. Afghan government indicated desire to join
Turkish-Pakistani pact, if US guarantees Afghanistan's
frontiers.

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2. Hostile comment nevertheless continues in officially controlled press.

III. Arab States

A. Egypt and Syria

1. Anticipatory press comment hostile, seeing in Turkish-Pakistani talks plot to break up Arab front.
2. Both countries now preoccupied by domestic crises.

B. Lebanon

1. Announcements overshadowed by Egyptian and Syrian crisis; sparse comment mildly favorable.

C. Saudi Arabia

1. Disapproves of agreements which would detract from Arab unity; no other comment.

D. Iraq

1. Prime minister Jamali indicated desire join pact almost unconditionally, announced intention make alliances without regard for opinions other Arab states.
2. Press comment and popular opinion remain hostile.

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IV. Others

A. Iran

1. Interested and sympathetic, but recognizes present conditions unfavorable for Iranian action.

B. Israel

1. Comment cautious. Israel fears possible strengthening of Iraq. Press, however, praised Turkey statesmanship.

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BACKGROUND

MIDDLE EAST REACTION TO TURKISH-PAKISTANI DEFENSE PLANS

1. Nehru to Ambassador Allen, 24 February: "I have never at any moment...had any thought whatsoever that US government, and least of all President Eisenhower, wished to do any damage to India."
2. Nehru to parliament, 1 March: "What is more important (than differences between US and Indian policies towards Communist China) is that a responsible official of the US government (Assistant Secretary of State Robertson) should say it is their policy that the US must dominate Asia for an indefinite period. Whatever the objective may be, the countries of Asia, and certainly India, do not accept this policy and do not propose to be dominated by any country for whatever purpose."
3. Egyptian press, 22 February: Turkish-Pakistani agreement is a "new imperialist attempt to drag Middle East countries into a war in which they have no interest."
4. Israeli press, 23 February: "...new pact must be seen as achievement of Turkish diplomacy.... Adhesion of Iraq would

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would entirely change complexion of matter as far as Israel is concerned. Israel cannot possibly reconcile herself to military strengthening of country which refused to sign armistice agreement with her and which through recent statements and acts demonstrates hatred against Israel."

5. Moscow radio, 23 February: "Preparations for the conclusion of a Turkish-Pakistani pact are in progress at the order of US aggressive circles and with their effective support. US aggressive circles have cast their greedy eyes on the strategic raw materials, military bases, and human cannon fodder in this region."

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